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History of The Week

By Arthur Schlesinger Jr.

It is the measure of the profound ambiguity of John Foster Dulles' views that, despite his long record in foreign affairs, one can argue with equal persuasiveness that he will be the most reckless Secretary of State we have had for a long time or that he will be the most cautious and even cowardly.

His reputation for recklessness stems from his sponsorship of the idea of keeping the peace through a "retaliatory striking force" and, in particular, from his fervent advocacy of a policy of "liberation" in Eastern Europe. Last Aug. 27, for example, he gave an extraordinary speech in Buffalo in which he described how, under a Republican administration, resistance movements would be built up in eastern Europe through parachute drops from the West.

Mr. Dulles is always careful to insert the phrase "peaceful methods" into such disquisitions. But it is hard to see what is so peaceful about instigating civil war. Yet one feels throughout that Mr. Dulles really knows better. He certainly knows, for example, that the administration policy has not been one of static and passive containment; after all, his own brother is deputy director of the Central Intelligence Agency. The policy of "liberation," he must realize, either means a continuation of things the Truman administration is doing already, or else it means a Third World War. The alleged debate between "containment" and "liberation," of course, is a phoney. The real issue is between peaceful pressure against the Soviet Empire and preventive war.

Because Mr. Dulles surely knows this, he seems to have been backing water on "liberation" since election. He flatly denies any responsibility today for Gen. Eisenhower's American Legion speech, in which the "liberation" doctrine was stated in its crudest form. It all suggests, in short, that much of the Dulles foreign policy talk in recent months has been purely political. That is why some of the alarm expressed abroad over the Dulles appointment is so unjustified. Our allies should be relieved to know that there is no reason to suppose that Mr. Dulles always believes what he says.

Indeed, if I were to hazard a guess, it would be that Mr. Dulles as Secretary of State would be more likely to err on the side of caution than of recklessness. He is cast in the mold of Neville Chamberlain, up to and including the psalm-singing. His book of 1939, "War, Peace and Changes," was the strongest American defense of the appeasement policy. And, while Mr. Dulles did awake early to the need for a firm policy against the Soviet Union, he still has had many moments of caution and even panic in the years since. It is hard to tell how he will stand up before a Congress hell-bent on slashing foreign aid and the defense budget.

It is sometimes forgotten that Mr. Dulles called for the admission of Red China to the United Nations in 1950. Indeed, the response to his appointment provides an interesting commentary on the one-party press. Suppose Adlai Stevenson, as president, had chosen as Secretary of State a man who had recommended Alger Hiss for his Carnegie job, who had served with Hiss on the Carnegie Board as late as 1950, who had been a financial contributor to the Institute of Pacific Relations as late as 1951, who in 1950 had demanded the admission of Red China to the UN. What fury there would be in the World-Telegram, what solemn and melancholy editorials in the Herald Tribune about how the Secretary of State, like Caesar's wife, must be above suspicion! But the one-party press breathes not a word against Mr. Dulles.

Still, the General could have done a lot worse. Mr. Dulles, it is true, is sanctimonious, slippery, evasive, vain and intellectually unscrupulous. Yet one feels that, at bottom, he knows the score. His problem is not one of intelligence but of courage. The question is whether he will have the guts and stamina to stand for a strong and stable foreign policy against those hotheads who will want to excommunicate our allies and solve all international problems by military might, and against those men of cold feet who will want to cut defense, cut foreign aid and let the world shift for itself.

While discussing the cabinet, one can properly conclude on a note of cheer. In Herbert Brownell, Gen. Eisenhower has appointed a man who will certainly be the best Attorney General since Francis Biddle. Both for political and other reasons,



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Mr. Brownell can probably be relied upon to resist the attempts of Sen. McCarthy and his friends to have a Roman holiday in the government files; and he should do much to improve the morale and operations of the whole federal system of justice.

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